



Article

THE CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF USING LIBRARY SERVICES IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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Introduction

Conflict is an inevitable part of human existence. People perceive conflict differently. For instance, Okoh (2005) perceived conflict as contradictions arising from differences in the interests, ideologies, orientations and precipitous tendencies of the people concerned. Oyeshola (2005), perceived it as disagreement, dispute or controversy in ideas, or viewpoints held by two or more individuals/groups. Pruitt and Rubin as cited by Oyeshola (2005), defined conflict as a 'perceived divergence of interest or beliefs that the parties' current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously'.

Conflict arises from the pursuit of divergent and contradictory interest, and/or groups in defined social and physical environments. These contradictions are inherent at all levels of social and economic interactions of the human race. It may exist at the individual, group, regional, national and international levels (Adeniji, 2003 and Okoh, 2005). Conflicts may have negative or positive effects. Burton (1987:138), noted that some people extol conflict as 'an essential creative element in human relations, the means to change and the means by which some social values of welfare, security, justice and opportunities for personal development can be achieved. A conflict is a dynamic phenomenon, which consists of five stages viz: initiation, escalation, controlled maintenance, abatement and termination/ resolution (Sandole, 1993).

Sources of Conflict

Studies have been made on the sources of conflict in various places. Adeniji (2003:48-51), reported that many factors have been identified as sources or potential sources of conflict in the Nigerian setting. These factors could be internal or external and they are;

- Land space and resource availability.
- Dispute over the jurisdiction of some traditional rulers and chiefs.
- Creation of local government councils and location of their headquarters.
- Ethnic and sectional competition over access to scarce political and economic resources.
- Micro and macro social structures in Nigeria.
- Population growth and expansionist tendencies of sustain ethnic bound occupations.
- Disregard for cultural symbols and pollution of cultural practices.
- Rise of ethnic nationalism and
- Sharia riots.

O'Hair (1995), cited by Owens- Ibie (2005) and Kahler (2002), added the following factors.

- Claims to status and power
- Incompatible goals
- Unrealistic expectations
- Differing rates of relational growth
- Inaccurate perceptions and attributions
- Cultural differences and
- Distribution of resources.

There are varieties of conflicts, such as interpersonal, family, office, community, institutional, gender, social religious, cultural, economic, political, federal government, state government, local government, armed, and international conflicts (Coser, 1968, Okoli, 2005, Francis, 2006 and Ndi, 2009).

Devastating Effects of Conflicts

Conflicts can lead to so many things. Dudley (1992), perceived that when there is conflict, people are killed, smote, imprisoned, exiled, beaten, segregated or isolated, maimed, injured, traumatized and displaced. Families are broken and scattered, youths and children fall into victims of rape, defilement, and abduction and this can increase

the risk of contracting diseases like HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Conflicts can cause famine and malnourishment. It can make the victims a fertile ground for poverty, ignorance, and disease. Conflicts have been a major threat to human security and sustainable development. It retards economic and social development. Okereke (2005), corroborated that it can lead to massive death, population displacement and destruction of property and infrastructure.

Conflict Resolution: An Overview

Mitchell and Banks (1998), referred to conflict resolution as an outcome in which the issues in an existing conflict are satisfactorily dealt with through a solution that is mutually acceptable to the parties, self-sustaining in the long run and productive of a new positive relationship between parties. According to Miller (2003), conflict resolution is a variety of approaches aimed at terminating conflicts through the constructive solving of problems, listening to our management or transformation of conflicts. Conflict resolution has to do with how best to resolve differences and conflicts in a mutually beneficial way (Week, 1992).

The need for conflict resolution is universally acknowledged. Conflict resolution scholars argue that conflict has an ontological basis in human needs, and it is the denial which causes violent and armed conflicts (Oyeshola, 2005). Conflict resolution is a subfield of peace researcher. There are many ways to resolve conflicts. These are by surrendering, running away, overpowering the opponent with violence, filing a lawsuit, etc. Primary conflict can be resolved using two basic approaches viz, peaceful negotiation or arbitration and force. Resolving a conflict by force is generally inadequate and difficult to manage. The use of force may include war, genocide, forced mass-population transfers, partition and/or secession, integration and/or assimilation. Peaceful conflict resolution implies approaching the conflict in a problem-solving, constructive and non-violent way, recognizing the value of the identity of all parties in the relationship, their human needs and interests, rather than a violent, destructive 'solution' or a mere settlement that 'freezes' the current power distribution between opponents (Oyeshola 2005).

However, Best (2006), identified the following approaches to conflict resolution:

1. ***Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)***: This is an application of "non-conventional" peaceful methods of settling disputes and resolving conflicts using

- the least expensive methods, and in ways that satisfy the parties and preserve the relationships after a settlement might have been reached.
2. ***African Traditional Dispute Resolution:*** In Africa, there are diversity of cultural and religious practices. They affect the ways by which conflicts are resolved generally. For instance, the kings and chiefs practice their indigenous culture admirably in resolving and managing conflicts within and between their domains. Those who are dissatisfied with the verdict of the functionaries proceed freely to settle the conflicts in the modern westernized sector, for example, the magistrates courts (Adeniji, 2003).
 3. ***Western Alternative Dispute Resolution:*** This method seeks to promote the use of non-violent approaches to conflict resolution. It involves the use of government ministries, police, and the courts-from magistrate to the Supreme Court.
 4. ***Negotiation:*** Miall, Ramsbotham and Woodhouse (1999), defined negotiation as “the process where the parties within the conflict seek to settle or resolve their conflicts.” The goal is to reach agreement through joint decision making between parties (Jeong, 2000).
 5. ***Mediation:*** This is a popular method used in conflict resolution. It involves the intervention of a third party who does not impose a solution on the parties. The role of the method is to create an enabling environment for the parties to have dialogue that will lead the resolution of pending conflict.
 6. ***Arbitration:*** This is the use and assistance of a neutral third party in conflict, who hears the evidence from both parties, and renders a decision which is binding on the parties (Best 2006). Arbitrators fulfill this role by virtue of the positions of authority they occupy in the society.
 7. ***Adjudication:*** This involves the use of the courts and litigation processes to resolve conflicts. The judgment given by the court is legally binding on the conflicting parties.
 8. ***Communication:*** This involves sharing and exchanging information between individuals, groups and parties in a conflict situation. This is where the services of libraries and information centers are needed in conflict resolution. Libraries are repositories of information and knowledge in various formats. Best (2006), noted that the exchange and sharing of information between conflicting parties can help to remove doubt, suspicion, ignorance and contribute to the process of peace building. All the methods of conflict resolution discussed above have one

thing in common, i.e., information; therefore, the place of information in conflict resolution cannot be over-stressed.

9. **Religion:** Oyeshola (2005), added religion as one of the methods used to resolve conflicts. He noted that all the methods discussed above are basically human and the spiritual dimension must be part of the efforts in negotiating for a conflict resolution. Religionists should be sincere in their practice of their faith, thus, bringing about permanent resolution of conflicts.

The Challenges of Using Library Services in Resolving Conflicts

It is an established fact that the services of libraries and information centers could be effectively employed in resolving conflicts permanently. Adewuyi (2009) and Haruna (2009), wrote comprehensively on how the services of libraries could promote conflict resolution. They noted that libraries should acquire and provide relevant information resources such as government publications, audio-visual materials, and cultural heritages, proceedings of court cases, daily newspapers and magazines for conflict resolution. These resources should be able to provide information on the various peaceful means of resolving conflicts. In their research report, Ntui, Ottong and Eden (2009), revealed that the roles library performs that help reduce conflict and crisis include;

- Provision of information about state and local business opportunities.
- Provision of information about the community.
- Provision of information on literacy skills.
- Providing information that will help the students with their studies.
- Help users access and use government services and resources.
- Circulate tape recordings of radio news and national events in the local language.
- Provide computer and internet skills training.
- Carry out exhibitions, display of information or posters, etc.

Haruna (2009), identified the following library services for conflict resolution;

- Current Awareness Services (CAS).
- Selective Dissemination of Information
- Indexing and abstracting
- Referral
- Conducting literature searches
- Current contents

- Organizing seminars, conferences, workshops, Symposia
- Exhibition of information resources on conflicts and related topics.
- Translations
- Mobile library
- Resources sharing

This paper discusses the challenges libraries have in providing the above highlighted services that could promote conflict resolution and the survival strategies. The following challenges should be considered.

Over-reliance on government as the only authority that could resolve conflicts. Most people believe it is only the government that could find solutions to conflicts as a matter of fact they refuse to cooperate with a third party non-governmental body (Best, Idyorough and Shehu, 2007).

Inadequate fund is one of the major problems libraries have worldwide. Most libraries do not have adequate finance to acquire information resources and render effective services to the users. Sometimes, libraries are faced with budgetary cuts while the prices of information resources continue to soar upwards. The global economic downturn is affecting the libraries seriously. The present situation now suggests that the era of stable and sustainable funding of library services is over. Nwofor (1999).and Edoka (2001), suggest that attention should be given to what libraries could do to generate substantial funds internally as part of the overall effort to contain the harsh economic situation. They noted that libraries derive fund from gifts, photocopying, consultancy services, bookbinding, electronic mail, telex and fax services. In a study conducted by Edoka (1992), he reported that some university libraries in Nigeria offer the following services for which fees were charged or planned: photocopying, interloan, telex, long (reference) enquiries, reading lists, bibliographies, document delivery, current contents, online information services and business/industrial information. The funds generated should be used to supplement the library vote. This scenario presents a terse picture of the financial predicament of libraries.

Unavailability of relevant information resources is another challenge. Some information resources are not available for-the-shelf purchase, examples are government publications, cultural heritage materials, proceedings of court cases or judgments,

audio-visual items like oral testimonies and recorded speeches and news. They could only be acquired by the libraries that have their depository right.

In addition, after acquiring these materials, they are processed and organized to ensure maximum utilization and preserved in a suitable environment to prolong their life span. This involves micro filming, air-conditioning and storage facilities which have greater financial implication for the library.

To ensure maximum utilization of some information resources by the users, especially in the rural or community libraries, they should be repackaged in local languages, audio and video tapes as well as drawings paintings. When information is repackaged in local languages, the rural dwellers can understand them better and become informed. Information empowers and improves the perceptions and ideas of man and reduces conflicts.

Translating information materials into local languages is not an easy task. Library staff has to be trained to acquire the requisite skill. In addition, some of the indigenes should be trained and re-trained to facilitate information dissemination to rural dwellers who are mainly illiterates. Conferences, workshops, seminars and symposia should be organized to enlighten them on issues bordering on land, resources, government decisions, the law and the need for peace and mutual co-existence. Exhibition of information resources on conflicts and related topics is also necessary as well as using experienced people in conflict resolution to be resource persons. All these activities call for special training.

Digital information systems such as electronic mail, internet, video conferencing, web contact, list serve, etc, could be used by libraries to promote conflict resolution (Haruna, 2009). Librarians and library users should acquire ICT skills before they could be able to utilize the above listed digital information systems. Unfortunately, most people in the developing countries are not computer literate. Aniebo (2004), suggests that computer literacy should be given a top priority in primary, post-primary and tertiary institutions and included in their curriculum.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The authors of this paper have discussed the multifarious challenges of using the library to resolve conflicts, consequently, the following recommendations are made:

Deliberate effort should be made to ensure that everybody is educated and enlightened about peace. This is because an enlightened society has the strongest chance of understanding, appreciating and resolving conflicts.

Investment in education should be seen as a crucial means of dealing with conflicts.

Libraries and information centres should make every effort to provide research materials to educational institutions and specialized institutes, think tanks and special research centres that are committed to peace-making and conflict resolution. It is obvious that the major cause of conflict is lack of adequate or proper information.

Adeniji (2003), recommended that government should have definite policy for youth education and also provide employment facilities for them especially in their own environment. When the youths are engaged in useful activities, they cannot participate in conflicts.

Government should improve all formal agents of conflict resolution including libraries especially public libraries. They should also implement promptly those recommendations found appropriate in resolving conflicts.

Libraries should organize book clubs and reading competitions between schools in the communities having regular conflicts. This friendly competition should be developed to displace conflict inclinations and relationships.

Yoroms (2005), recommended that Early Warning Systems (EWS) could be used as conflict resolution mechanism. This process among other things include alerting the society about impending conflict situations.

Organizations such as the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) use EWS for conflict prevention, management and resolution. Libraries can as well use EWS in resolving conflicts by providing information through the mass media and posters on impending conflict situations. Libraries can also partner with these organizations by providing timely and relevant information on conflict situations.

Community or rural libraries should be established in the rural areas. Such libraries should be well equipped bearing in mind the caliber of the potential users. Museums should also be established. It is necessary to keep artifacts of peace and the history of how ethnic group have kept peace in the past through these artifacts for future consultation.

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